



Graduates attend Afghan Local Police ceremony at Forward Operating Base Marjah, April 2011

# Making the Afghan Civil-Military Imbalance Conducive to Democratization

BY CHRISTIAN BAYER TYGESEN

**I**n-conflict state-building in fragile states (such as Iraq and Afghanistan), defined as building effective and legitimate civilian and military state institutions to advance the stabilization and democratization of the state,<sup>1</sup> creates unbalanced civil-military relations in the host state by producing weak and dysfunctional civilian institutions vis-à-vis relatively stronger and more functional military institutions. This imbalance positions the military to become a dominant political actor in state formation upon the withdrawal of the international military presence. This can have significant implications for the political trajectory of the state.

The civil-military gap is a reflection of the asymmetric nature of state-building progress in the context of state failure: building civilian institutions cannot match the trajectory of progress in building military institutions. This is in large part due to four crosscutting drivers, introduced below, that condition the timelines of progress in the civilian and military state-building tracks differently. Once the host state is in charge of its own affairs, the political risks of the civil-military imbalance will assert themselves: the military, still in an early stage of professionalization and confronted by weak civilian institutions, will become a politicized and dominant actor in the continuing state formation process. The political prospects of the state will become highly dependent upon the political role of the military and its relationship with the civilian elite.

The civil-military imbalance is also crucial to the long-term state-building outcome in Afghanistan and Iraq. In both countries, the state will likely face internal threats of a deeply contested political nature for many years. Stakeholders in the illicit economy, irreconcilable insurgents, and antigovernment warlords, to name a few, will continue to cause political ruptures and spikes of instability. The Iraqi state is wrestling with such challenges today and the Afghan state will likely follow suit. Internal threats cannot be tackled in a political vacuum; they are entangled in a highly sensitive and politicized context such as disputes over the distribution of oil revenue

*Christian Bayer Tygesen is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Sciences at Copenhagen University.*

in Iraq, land rights in Afghanistan, and the legitimacy of armed nonstate groups in both countries. The military will become politicized or at least be perceived as such.

Civil-military relations theory tells us that the politicization of the military is detrimental to democratization. It undermines the professionalism of the military, which in turn weakens military effectiveness and cohesion. Furthermore, the politicization of the military is typically marked by a struggle among groups vying for control over the military. Subjective elite interests could capture the armed forces, leaving disenfranchised groups with no alternatives but to accept their political marginalization, continue to seek influence within military ranks, or arm themselves to deter predatory state behavior and hedge against a civil war. Moreover, politicizing pressures from outside and within the military could undermine its cohesion, leading to its

*state-builders do not have the luxury of ruling the military out of politics based on conventional zero-sum understandings of democratic development and the political military*

fragmentation. Upon the withdrawal of the international military presence, therefore, the political future of the state becomes a story of the role of the military. Will it remain loyal to the state's national interests, will autocratic powers in uniforms or suits use the military as an instrument to monopolize political power, or will the military fall apart, thereby dissolving the most robust and foundational pillar of the state?

In Afghanistan and Iraq, state-builders have failed to address the civil-military

imbalance and the military's politicization. In Afghanistan, a growing civil-military imbalance is making the country's political progress increasingly vulnerable to would-be autocrats in suits or uniforms. In Iraq, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has seized the civil-military imbalance to gradually monopolize control of the military. Some observers—and many Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds—fear Iraq may soon be ruled by a new iron fist. A relapse to autocracy would be a revolution in terms, but not the kind anyone would have hoped for.

If dealt with effectively and from the start of the state-building effort, the civil-military relations of the host state can be conducive to democratization despite the inevitable imbalance and the military's politicization. But the answers to this challenge are not found in the prescriptions offered by conventional security sector reform (SSR) policy. They are unfeasible given the near-term obstacles inherent in a failed state context, and they fail to adequately address the civil-military imbalance and the political role of the military. State-builders simply do not have the luxury of ruling the military out of politics based on conventional zero-sum understandings of democratic development and the political military.<sup>2</sup>

This article introduces the civil-military gap and its implications and suggests how to deal with them. It begins by presenting a key driver of this gap: the distinct obstacles that shape the respective timelines of the civilian and military state-building tracks. This is followed by an examination of the civil-military gap in the state-building effort in Afghanistan and the political risks incurred by the civil-military imbalance in Iraq. Finally, the article presents steps to deal with the political risks caused by the civil-military imbalance.

## Civil-Military Gap and Its Political Risks

A host of context-particular factors influence the civilian or military state-building tracks separately. But one must look at constant, crosscutting drivers in order to compellingly compare and explain the trajectories of the civilian and military state-building tracks. Against this backdrop, the following four factors are identified as key drivers of the asymmetric trajectories of the civilian and military state-building tracks:

- difference in the time span and process of building capacity in the civilian and military tracks
- difference in the civilian and military institutions' receptiveness to reform
- difference in the international leverage toward the civilian and military institutions
- difference in the level of national preferences toward reform in the civilian and military institutions.

These drivers are prominent in the literature on state-building, SSR, and military change and were common denominators in the interviews I conducted with a wide array of international and national actors over the course of 7 months in Kabul in 2011 and 2012. The underlying mechanisms of the four drivers of the civil-military gap are introduced in the examination of Afghanistan.

One could argue that if deficiencies in the international state-building effort—such as lack of resources or disunity of effort—were fixed or reduced, the civil-military gap would be closed as a result of a more effective civilian state-building effort. But this argument is based on the premise that international actions are the primary determinants of state-building

outcome or, at least, they are influential as national determinants such as local capacity, local preferences, and so forth. But as experiences in Afghanistan and past state-building missions have shown, the impact of international efforts on state-building outcome is highly dependent upon national actions and local circumstances.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of an effective national effort, therefore, a more effective international effort would yield little added benefit. It may reduce the civil-military gap, but this article posits that it would not close it. In theory, only a change in the effectiveness of the national effort could close the gap, but this is hardly realistic, as exemplified by the case study of Afghanistan.

The asymmetric development of the state's national civilian and military institutions sets the stage for unbalanced civil-military relations: weak, ineffective, and divided civilian institutions vis-à-vis relatively stronger and more effective military institutions.<sup>4</sup> In addition, given the fragile state environment, the military will most likely have to address internal security threats and deal with the subsequent politicization.

Checked by weak civilian institutions and politicized by the domestic threat environment, the risk of political interventions by the military is high. Motives for interventions vary. They can be subjective, to advance the military's own political or economic agenda, or more objectively oriented, aimed at taking more direct control of national security affairs if the civilian government is deemed too weak or divided to shoulder the responsibility.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in a fragile state context with a nascent democratic culture, the civil-military imbalance renders civilian leaders dependent upon the military leadership for maintaining internal stability, facilitating civilian

reconstruction efforts, and safeguarding the political order.<sup>6</sup> This has the dual effect of making the military both powerful and crucial as an arena in which various political factions will seek to expand their influence. In sum, the military is well positioned to become a dominant actor in the long-term state formation effort. In the initial years following international withdrawal, this saying will generally apply: “As goes the military, so goes the state.”

As a way of approaching the challenge in a structured manner, the civil-military imbalance can be understood as posing three structural risks to the state’s democratization and potentially its stability.

**Civilian Autocracy.** A civilian political faction monopolizes control of the military at the expense of democratic standards of civilian control and, to some extent, the military’s autonomy. The loyalty of the military leadership is secured through patronage, threats, purges, and parallel military structures. The military is used as a blunt instrument to advance the subjective interests of the elite and safeguard regime survival.

*the military institutions in fragile states are generally more capable, funded, and trusted than the civilian institutions of the state*

**Military Rule.** In the absence of effective civilian institutions to enforce civilian control, the military, propelled by its corporate interests, evolves from being the main security facilitator of the state formation effort to its main benefactor. The military leadership’s political and economic power grows as military intervention into politics escalates. Alternatively, a civil-military split over national security affairs may lead to a military intervention on the

grounds that the government is deemed unfit to define, administer, and protect the national interest. Both scenarios pave the way for direct or indirect military rule.

**State Collapse.** The illegitimacy and weakness of the civilian or military leadership sets off an arms race between nonstate armed groups and the intense politicization of all communal factions as they compete for control of the military and political power.<sup>7</sup> The risk of civil war grows as state institutions fail to facilitate an orderly, legitimate, and deliberative democratization. The state splinters along factional lines.

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive to posit that the same institutional civil-military imbalance can lead to all three outcomes in a fragile state environment. Civilian autocracies and military regimes are different typologies of civil-military relations. But in a fragile state they generally share a common institutional imbalance. Indeed, the military was subordinate to civilian principals in autocracies such as North Vietnam or postcolonial Indonesia as opposed to the military regimes of Ne Win’s Burma or Idi Amin’s Uganda. But in both cases, the military institutions were a foundational institutional pillar of the regime.

The military institutions in fragile states are generally more capable, funded, and trusted than the civilian institutions of the state. To the extent civilian autocrats enforce effective control over the military in such states, it is personalized, centralized, and based on various co-opt-proofing measures such as patronage, indoctrination, and balancing mechanisms within the military. It is rarely based on strong institutional capacity within the government or parliament—a defining characteristic of democratic civilian control in strong states. In fact, civilian autocratic



control of the military can often be somewhat restricted. Under Suharto in Indonesia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, the military enjoyed significant autonomy and economic privileges.<sup>8</sup> The civilian control was only effective inside the perimeters of the military's red lines.

It is important to note that the three long-term risk scenarios are not mutually exclusive. For instance, direct military rule can follow from an intervention to supplant a civilian autocrat, or the military can install a civilian autocrat to forestall state collapse. The outcome depends on a host of factors beyond the scope of this article, such as the quality and actions of leaders, political culture, security environment, and actions of international stakeholders. But the article does address a common challenge central to all three long-term risks: the primacy of the military as the most capable and, quite often, most popular institution of the state.

An important reason for the emphasis on the primacy of the military is that it strikes at the crux of a problem in dominant SSR policy as practiced today. As a line of effort in in-conflict state-building in fragile states such as Iraq and Afghanistan, dominant SSR policy seeks to advance a functional and democratic civil-military relation by conventional means. This includes key priorities such as bolstering civilian institutions and ensuring civilian control in accordance with human rights, inducing democratic norms in the apolitical professionalization of the military, enhancing the democratic culture to make political legitimacy unobtainable by the military leadership, and so on.<sup>9</sup>

While effective democratic civilian control is no doubt important to a fragile state's long-term democratization (decades, not years), the immediate conditions in nonpermissive

environments render such conventional steps unfeasible in the near term (years, not decades). The necessary conditions for liberal models of civil-military relations are absent.<sup>10</sup> The civilian institutions are weak, the state's monopoly on violence is contested, the democratic culture is fragile, and the military is more capable and popular than the civilian institutions tasked to keep it in check. Moreover, conventional SSR thinking fails to recognize that the civil-military imbalance and the military's politicization is a near-term reality that must be addressed. Can the politicization of the military be shaped to support the democratization of the state? We return to this question after looking at Afghanistan and Iraq.

### Civil-Military Gap as Driver of Imbalance

Comparing the institutional development of a state's civilian and military institutions can seem questionable at face value. They serve different aims, harness different skills, and exhibit different organizational traits. But by comparing their respective institutional development against the backdrop of their respective core functions, it becomes possible to discern whether their development is comparably balanced or unbalanced. Are they developing symmetrically toward attaining the capacity necessary to fulfill their respective core functions? The answer reveals how the state's civil-military relations are developing and offers insight into probable future patterns of civilian control of the military and the state's political plight.

On the whole, the Afghan National Army (ANA) has developed substantially. In strictly quantitative terms, ANA, facing numerous difficulties, grew at a slow pace from 2002 to 2008,<sup>11</sup> but then it surged from 79,000 in

October 2008 to 171,600 in October 2011 to reach its final growth target of 195,000 in September 2012. But, as the much worn-out argument goes, the ANA's development is much more than growth rates; its operational capabilities, military effectiveness, and professionalization have also progressed.<sup>12</sup> By March 2012, the ANA participated in 95 percent of all operations nationwide, led almost 40 percent of all operations, and manned and conducted 85 percent of the training.<sup>13</sup> This progress is also reflected in the headway made in the transition process, a phased transferral of lead security responsibility to the ANA within designated areas. The first two tranches, covering about half of the population, were launched in March and November 2011. By the summer of 2012, the number of enemy-initiated

attacks had declined in almost all of the transitioned areas—not least in Lashkar Gah, the capital of the volatile Helmand Province.<sup>14</sup> Many factors account for this, not least the conflict-dampening effect of a reduced international military presence, but most Afghan and international security experts I spoke to in Kabul in the summer of 2012 highlighted the ANA's performance as crucial. Indeed, the army still faces substantial challenges, and it still cannot shoulder the entire security burden alone.<sup>15</sup> It still has significant capability gaps within areas such as logistics, medical evacuation, and operational planning. Problems with attrition, corruption, cohesion, and poor leadership remain prevalent.<sup>16</sup> But much suggests that it has made clear strides toward assuming full responsibility for Afghanistan's internal



U.S. Embassy Kabul

Judicial graduation ceremony held at Afghanistan Supreme Court

security and will require significantly reduced international support by late 2014.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, the development of Afghan civilian institutions at the national level has been more incremental and modest. Positive exceptions include a handful of ministries such as the Ministries of Finance and Education, but they do not wield the main levers of civilian control of the military. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) trainers point to the increasing capacity of the Ministry of Defense (MOD), but it remains heavily militarized as officers fill the vast majority of positions of influence. There are no signs that this will change anytime soon. Uniforms monitoring uniforms hardly constitutes civilian control. One anecdote captures this military dominance well. When former Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak—who was often referred to by his military rank of general—traveled abroad, the chief of the general staff, General Shir Mohammad Karimi, served as *de facto* acting minister. The first deputy minister of defense, Mr. Nazeri, the only through-and-through civilian in the MOD top tier and formally next in line after Wardak, simply lacked the weight to control his own ministry.

The capacity of the presidential palace is strong at the top level but often described as one-man deep. The national security council provides an important, institutionalized, and weekly platform for President Hamid Karzai to address national security issues and exercise his prerogatives as commander in chief. But civilian control exerted from the presidential palace is highly personalized and centralized and almost exclusively limited to the president and his closest advisors. The capacity of the Parliament is anemic, rendering the legislative branch—the primary democratic check on the executive’s control of the ANA—highly

dysfunctional.<sup>18</sup> The Parliament’s decision in August 2012 to move for the dismissal of Minister of Defense Wardak and Minister of Interior Bismullah Khan was, at first glance, a show of muscle.<sup>19</sup> But based on past trends in Afghan domestic politics, the Parliament could not have acted with such force without the consent of the presidential palace. In addition, Wardak’s sacking does not detract from the fact that the Parliament has little institutional capacity to systematically monitor the actions of the ANA and the government.<sup>20</sup> Four crosscutting drivers inherent in the state-building effort have been central to this civil-military gap.

### *it takes at least a generation to build effective civilian institutions from nothing*

---

The training time and process in the civilian and military state-building tracks are substantially different. It takes decades to educate and train a civil service corps from scratch to being able to fulfill the most basic governance functions. This is supported by studies of civilian institution-building in fragile states, which find that it takes at least a generation to build effective civilian institutions from nothing.<sup>21</sup> The necessary baseline skills include basic literacy, basic administrative capacity, and sufficient expertise within a specific area of government. A civil servant must at least have a basic education supplemented by some level of further education to carry out the main tasks of the job description. The military rank and file is much quicker to train and deploy. A newly commissioned soldier has completed 8 weeks of basic warrior training and 9 weeks of branch-school training in an assigned battalion. Only officers have an



educational background comparable to, if not more extensive than, an able mid- or higher-level civil servant.

This is compounded by the profound differences in the civilian and military training process. ANA recruits are channeled through a highly structured and supervised training program backed by a strong effort led by the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> Would-be civil servants must chart their own courses through a dysfunctional higher educational sector backed by an uncoordinated international effort. Graduates must then overcome obstacles such as deficient salary resources, nepotism, and bureaucratic inefficiency to join the civil service. In contrast, the private is almost instantly assigned to a battalion and deployed after completing basic warrior training.

A second driver of the civil-military gap is the respective institutional receptiveness to reform of the civilian and military institutions. The ANA has a centralized and hierarchical command structure under the general staff and, although still not sufficient, a pool of trained officers to draw on to build capacity. This has increased ANA institutional receptiveness to reform and induced conditions conducive to institution-building. Factional divides continue to strain internal cohesion, but the ramifications have so far mostly been limited to the distribution of positions at the division and corps level or in the general staff. While the factional power balancing is disconcerting and must be dealt with, the overriding and shared goal of a professional and capable ANA has persevered to uphold the military's receptiveness to reform and institution-building.

In comparison, security-related civilian institutions were less conducive to absorbing capacity and reform.<sup>23</sup> Intra- and

inter-ministerial tension, inefficient institutional processes, weak absorption capacity, and duplication of tasks and responsibilities severely hampered their receptiveness to reform. Furthermore, the strong prevalence of a military mindset in the MOD made it reluctant to embrace international advisors' call for a civilianization of the staff and its bureaucratic practices.<sup>24</sup> This was exacerbated by a distinct shortfall of trained civilians with sector-specific skills, let alone a basic knowledge of public administration.

Third, the international leverage has been greater in the military state-building track than in the civilian track.<sup>25</sup> The ANA's development in terms of personnel, institutional capacity, and capabilities was highly dependent on the international community's advisors and trainers, financial assistance, and material support. The ANA had no alternative but to cooperate with its international counterparts if it were to avoid the daunting costs of failing to be ready to take on full responsibility for Afghanistan's security by 2014.

The leverage of international actors in the civilian state-building track has been more limited—or at least far more difficult to utilize.<sup>26</sup> To be sure, civilian institutions were also dependent on international financial and technical support. But they faced few if any costs for not cooperating with international efforts to build capacity. Unlike Afghan military institutions, which had a strong incentive to build capacity to shoulder the security responsibilities that were increasingly transferred to them, the cost for civilians of failing to build sufficient capacity to provide basic services was minimal. Lack of accountability and transparency allowed obstructive and malign actors at all levels of the civilian institutions to pursue corrupt activities or otherwise spoil

the capacity-building effort with relative impunity.<sup>27</sup> Often, the best reform-minded Afghans could hope for was that the spoilers would be moved to different positions.

Fourth, differences in the prevalent Afghan preferences toward reform across the civilian and military tracks drove the civil-military gap. As a new and still unsustainable military institution confronted by the dual pressures of a potent insurgency and a rapid transition timetable, prevailing preferences in the general staff and among ANA corps commanders were strongly in favor of implementing the necessary reforms to build a capable and professional army. Furthermore, there continues to be a pervasive recognition that cooperating with the international community is the key to attaining this goal.<sup>28</sup> Of course, the partnership has by no means been frictionless, but the tension has been most pronounced at the lower levels.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast, reform-averse preferences were prevalent at all levels of the civilian institutions, complicating the civilian state-building track even further.<sup>30</sup> The aversion toward reform reflected both legitimate Afghan reservations toward adopting Western bureaucratic models and norms and more malevolent preferences toward maintaining opaque, dysfunctional, and unaccountable practices to maintain space for corruption and patronage.<sup>31</sup> Of course, corruption has undercut the capacity-building effort in both the military and civilian tracks. There is neither sufficient nor valid data to adequately compare the levels of corruption in the military and civilian spheres. But an approximation, based in part on experience and national perceptions of the high credibility of the ANA vis-à-vis the strained public support for most government institutions,<sup>32</sup> tends toward expecting more

corruption within the latter. If corruption was a larger obstacle in the civilian state-building track than in the military track, it should have reinforced the civil-military gap.

### Risks to Afghanistan's Political Development post-2014

Afghanistan's civil-military imbalance may have decisive consequences for its political future after 2014. The ANA is poised to become a dominant actor in the state formation of post-International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> Checked by ineffective civilian institutions, marked by fragile professionalism and cohesion, and confronting a host of internal and deeply politicized security threats, the military will become politicized—through politicizing pressures from outside factions vying for control, by direct political action by the military, or by being perceived by parts of Afghanistan's heterogeneous population as a subjective party in a politically charged crisis.

*there is neither sufficient nor valid data to adequately compare the levels of corruption in the military and civilian spheres*

Despite the civil-military imbalance and the politicization of the ANA, Afghanistan's civil-military relations can still be conducive to a democratic and stable development. It depends on the political role of the military—will it be supportive of democratization or undermine it?

One plausible post-2014 scenario is that a stronger president, newly elected and less constrained due to the international withdrawal, tightens his grip on the military to use it as a blunt instrument to monopolize political

power. Afghan history is full of examples of this, such as the Iron Amir, Abdual Rahman, who sought to centralize power in Kabul via a brutal use of the armed forces. An important counterweight to this scenario is that if the equilibrium in the distribution of power among Afghanistan's ethnic factions within the security apparatus is undercut, it would most likely have destabilizing ramifications. All serious Afghan political leaders are aware of this. The current arms buildup among Tajik groups in the North serves as both a reminder of this lesson and a deterrent against Pashtun-led brinkmanship or power grabs in Kabul.

A second scenario is that the military intervenes to install a new civilian leadership, as in the Saur Revolution in 1978, or to seize political power itself and rule behind a civilian façade, as in Iran or Pakistan. The ANA's dependence on international support may reduce this risk, although a reckless and divisive civilian government would provide the ANA with a strong case for intervening to restore responsible governance.

Third, a probable post-2014 scenario is that the military becomes the center of a power struggle between ethnic factions vying for control over the ANA. Many signs indicate that this power struggle is already playing out today, with ongoing and intense competition among ethnic blocks over the distribution of positions within the general staff and the corps and division commanders. This competition will likely intensify toward 2014 and beyond as the importance of the ANA increases as a function of ISAF's withdrawal. It is unclear how much pressure the ANA's cohesion can withstand. But caught in a politicized and ethnicized cross-pressure, the ANA could fragment. The state would collapse in the absence of its strongest pillar, as the Najibullah regime

did in the spring of 1992 with such devastating and chaotic consequences.

## **Iraq's Unbalanced Civil-Military Relations**

Iraq provides insight into how the risks of the civil-military imbalance emerge upon the international military withdrawal. Iraqi civil-military relations are marked by an imbalance between a relatively professional and effective military apparatus and weak, although growing, civilian state institutions.<sup>34</sup>

The civil-military imbalance has made it possible for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to gradually monopolize control of the military in general and the counterterrorism forces in particular.<sup>35</sup> This became increasingly evident once the U.S. withdrawal gained pace in 2009 and 2010.<sup>36</sup> Al-Maliki circumvents formal structures of civilian control by issuing orders to various military units directly from his office.<sup>37</sup> Admittedly, such a hands-on approach may be necessary given the ineffectiveness of the civilian institutions and Iraq's ongoing security threats. On the other hand, al-Maliki has also demonstrated a readiness to use the military as a blunt instrument against political foes or as the coercive muscle to back up politicized civilian offices.<sup>38</sup> Such moves understandably stoke fears that Iraq is sliding back into a predatory state masked by a democratic façade.<sup>39</sup>

In an assessment of Iraq's political future, Ned Parker identifies three bleak outcomes that align well with the three risks incurred by the civil-military imbalance: an authoritarian power grab by al-Maliki that instigates a violent backlash by his political enemies and Iraq's large sectarian and ethnic minorities; a military intervention to seize power and subject Iraq's political order to direct or indirect military rule; or a de facto state collapse as

Iraq's Kurdish, Sunni, and Shia leaders divide the state into autonomous regions.<sup>40</sup> Other observers find Parker's analysis too bleak and crude, but while the jury may be out, it seems hard to deny that Iraq's hard-won democratic progress can still unravel due to its dysfunctional civil-military relations.<sup>41</sup>

This should not be taken as a critique of the decision to train and build an effective Iraqi military. Indeed, this has been crucial to the stabilization of the country and ensuring an orderly and responsible U.S. withdrawal. But it does underline that the civil-military gap inherent in state-building cannot be neglected. The failure to address the increasing civil-military imbalance while the United States still had the necessary time, resources, and leverage may inadvertently paved the way for the unraveling of Iraq's democracy.

## Conclusion

This article makes the case that in-conflict state-building generates unbalanced civil-military relations in the host state. This is largely due to the civil-military gap inherent in in-conflict state-building, which seeks to build both military and civilian institutions to provide a viable basis for military withdrawal. Civilian and military institutions at the national level will develop asymmetrically, with the former unable to match the progress of the latter. Military institutions are simply more conducive to short-term institution-building.

Four crosscutting drivers were identified as critical to the civil-military gap in state-building: the difference in time span and process between training military and civilian personnel; the difference in the institutional receptiveness to reform; the difference in international leverage in the military and civilian state-building track; and the difference

in preferences toward reform. These fundamental differences condition the civilian and military state-building track, making it impossible to ensure symmetric progress across the tracks. The dynamics of the civil-military gap are evident in the state-building effort in Afghanistan. As expected, that effort is generating an increasing civil-military imbalance in the fragile Afghan state. How can the political risks engendered by the civil-military imbalance be effectively addressed?

The impetus among security sector reformers is to focus on the civilian side of the equation: build civilian institutions to ensure strong civilian control, develop practices of civilian monitoring and parliamentary oversight, advance institutions and norms of rule of law to safeguard human rights, promote mechanisms of oversight by the civil society through a vibrant media and the freedom of speech and press, and so on. Measures toward

*failure to address the civil-military imbalance while the United States still had the necessary resources may have paved the way for the unraveling of Iraq's democracy*

the military are less developed and draw on classic civil-military relations ideals: promote an apolitical, professional military that adheres to the principle of civilian control. While necessary for consolidating democratization in the long term, such measures are both inadequate and unfeasible in the initial, crisis-prone stages of Afghanistan's political development in the near term. State-builders and security sector reformers alike must pursue more realistic measures. This entails dealing with the military's politicization and recognizing the civil-military imbalance as the baseline.

This should include a deliberate and proactive effort to shape the military's politicization in a manner that is conducive to democratization. What follows are four measures to promote democratically conducive civil-military relations in the near term.

***Promote Converging Civil-Military Preferences.*** Promote a shared political horizon between the civilian and military leadership that identifies national security interests and maintains civilian control of the military and democratization as key principles. This includes fostering an understanding within the military leadership that the military's core preferences are tied to the state's stability and democratic progress. The aim is to reduce the risk of a split between the civilian and military leadership over national security issues (a distinct possibility due to the fused nature of internal security and domestic politics). Furthermore, the aim is to foster an understanding within the officer corps that it is in the military's institutional interest to guard against autocratic pressures from within (coup-inclined officers) and outside (power-grabbing civilians).

***Promote Military Cohesion.*** Promote a nationalistic, professional ethic in the military to gradually override the strong emphasis on ethnic and sectarian balance in the military (an emphasis, which, unless replaced by a nationalistic ethic, will harden sub-identities inside the military and undermine cohesion). This will buttress the military against politicizing pressures from subgroups vying for subjective control of the military.<sup>42</sup>

***Recognize and Shape the Military's Role on High-politics Issues Concerning National Interests.*** The role of the military in politics must be recognized. Even if it seeks to remain politically neutral, it will be perceived as

political by parts of the population due to the politically charged nature of internal threats. This needs to be addressed head-on by carving out space in the national debate for a legitimate military voice on high-politics issues in close coordination with, and subject to the approval of, civilian leadership.

***Hand Civilians the Power of the Purse.*** The military budget must be under the control of the civilian government. This could be advanced by disbursing bilateral and multilateral military assistance to the national fiscal budget, allowing the relevant civilian government institutions to channel the funds to the military. This would serve to reinforce the formal civil-military hierarchy in symbolic and concrete ways and thereby counter the institutional imbalance between civilians and their military counterparts.

The first three measures seek to shape the politicization of the military into a constructive force behind the democratization of Afghanistan. The fourth measure is aimed to ensure that the otherwise weak civilian institutions have an effective lever of control over the military to mitigate the civil-military imbalance. Such steps are crucial in order to keep Afghanistan on an even keel in the near term. Despite ethnic tensions, all major factions within the population must have sufficient faith in the national purpose of the military. Despite intervening neighbors and an ongoing insurgency, the population must be able to rely on the capability of the military to advance the country's security. Despite a history of failed governance and conflict, the population must begin to see the state as an effective guarantor of the national interest. And despite inept and often corrupt civilian institutions, a frail democratic culture, and a stumbling political process, all stakeholders must increasingly put



their trust in the democratic standards that guide civilian control of the military.

The challenge of Afghanistan's civil-military imbalance is where the security transition—the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces—and the political transition—placing Afghanistan's democratization on a sustainable foundation—overlap to become mutually reinforcing or mutually undermining.

State-builders should simultaneously pursue conventional SSR aims of building effective and legitimate state institutions and advancing the basic conditions for effective and democratic civilian control. After 2014, during Afghanistan's so-called transformational decade and beyond, it will be both necessary and possible—provided the state institutions grow stronger and the democratic culture more robust—to gradually reduce the military's political role and institute more conventional forms of democratic civilian control. The military should not have a lasting voice on political issues, nor should its focus on internal security remain.

Understanding the dynamics of the civil-military gap and recognizing the risks entailed by the civil-military imbalance are crucial to advancing sustainable stability and democratization in fragile state environments such as Afghanistan. Developments in Iraq demonstrate how a failure to address the civil-military imbalance incurs considerable political risks. Iraq's future is not set in stone, but the international leverage to affect it is now significantly diminished. It would be a tragedy if this mistake is repeated in Afghanistan. If Afghanistan is to stand on its own beyond 2014, the state-building effort must address the increasing civil-military imbalance. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> David Lake, "The Practice and Theory of U.S. State-building," *Journal of Intervention and State-building* 4, no. 3 (2010), 257–284, describes how this form of state-building emerged in 2007 in his examination of how U.S. approaches to state-building have developed since the Cold War.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Stepan describes this liberal bias in his seminal *Rethinking Military Politics—Brazil and the Southern Cone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 128–145. See also Larry Diamond and Mark Plattner, *Civil Military Relations and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 83–85.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Astri Suhrke, *When More Is Less: The International Project in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011); Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk, eds., *The Dilemmas of State-building: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* (New York: Routledge, 2009); James Dobbins et al., *The Beginner's Guide To Nation-Building* (Washington, DC: RAND, 2007). Seth Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," *RAND Counterinsurgency Study*, vol. 4 (Santa Monica: RAND National Defense Research Institute), 7–24, makes a convincing, parallel point, coined as "the fallacy of the external actor," on the determinants of counterinsurgency outcomes.

<sup>4</sup> Suhrke, 231; Jason Wood, "The Importance of Cohesion in the Afghan National Army to Post-Transition Afghanistan," *The RUSI Journal* 157, no. 4 (August/September 2012), 42–47.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback—The Role of the Military in Politics*, 4<sup>th</sup> printing (London: Transaction Publishers, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 129–140.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 192–263.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Cook, *Ruling But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); and Marcus Mietzner, *Military Politics, Islam, and the State in Indonesia—From Turbulent Transition to Democratic Consolidation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 37–59, 291–329, 360–384.

<sup>9</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Security Sector Reform and Governance," in *DAC Guidelines and Reference Series*; OECD, *OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice*, 2007 ed.; Mark Sedra, "Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan: The Slide Towards Expediency," *International Peacekeeping* 13, no. 1 (2006), 94–110; Mark Sedra, ed., *The Future of Security Sector Reform* (Waterloo, ON: The Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2010); and Dylan Hendrickson and Andrzej Karkoszka, "The Challenges of Security Sector Reform," in *SIPRI Yearbook 2002: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, 181.

<sup>10</sup> Albrecht Schnabel, "Ideal Requirements versus Real Environments in Security Sector Reform," in *Security Sector Reform in Challenging Environments*, ed. Hans Born and Albrecht Schnabel (Münster: LIT, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Obaid Younossi et al., *The Long March—Building an Afghan National Army* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2009); Antonio Giustozzi, "Auxiliary Force or National Army? Afghanistan's 'ANA' and the Counter-Insurgency Effort, 2002–2006," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18, no. 1 (2007).

<sup>12</sup> David M. Rodriguez, "Leaving Afghanistan to the Afghans: A Commander's Take on Security," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 5 (September/October 2011), 45–53; William Caldwell, "Security, Capacity, and Literacy," *Military Review*, January–February 2011; and Stephen Biddle, "The Difference Two Years Make," *The American Interest* 7, no. 1 (September–October 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on Denmark's National Television (DR1), February 11, 2012. See also NATO, "Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF): Training and Development," Media Backgrounder, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> The scale of the decline varies across different reports, but the trend lines generally point in the same direction. See Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, *Quarterly Data Report, Q1 2012*; Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, *Quarterly Data Report, Q2 2012*; NATO Media Backgrounder on ANSF, February 2012; and International Security Assistance Force records of monthly security trends, available at <[www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/monthly-trends.html](http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/monthly-trends.html)>.

<sup>15</sup> In particular, high annual attrition rates, professionalism, and internal cohesion continue to be central obstacles.

<sup>16</sup> Wood.

<sup>17</sup> Rodriguez; Biddle; William Caldwell, "DoD News Briefing with Lt. Gen. Caldwell via Teleconference from Afghanistan," *DOD News*, February 11, 2011;

Bruce Reidel and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Mission Incomplete," *Foreign Policy*, March 13, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Suhrke, 117–154, 229–234; Reidel and O'Hanlon; Biddle.

<sup>19</sup> Alissa Rubin, "Two Top Afghan Security Ministers Face Dismissal," *The New York Times*, August 4, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> In interviews conducted in June 2012, key ministers on defense issues in the Parliament acknowledged that the Parliament has little capacity to monitor the Afghan National Army and is often sidelined or disregarded by the Karzai government.

<sup>21</sup> *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), 11.

<sup>22</sup> William Caldwell, "DoD News Briefing with Lt. Gen. Caldwell via Teleconference from Afghanistan," *DOD News*, August 23, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Suhrke, 136–140; see also *World Development Report 2011*.

<sup>24</sup> Interviews with international advisors to the Ministry of Defense.

<sup>25</sup> The United States provided approximately 90 percent of the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) annual budget from 2010 to 2012 and provided by far the majority of NTM-A personnel.

<sup>26</sup> Suhrke, 140.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 126–140.

<sup>28</sup> Caldwell; Younossi et al., 7–8. This is backed by findings from several discussions and briefings with NTM-A advisors and senior officials, meetings with senior officers in the ANA General Staff and at the National Military Academy of Afghanistan, discussions with ANA officers in Nahr-e Saraj (Helmand Province), and observations at Afghan interagency meetings with representatives from the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Intelligence, National Security Council, National Directorate of Security, and international representatives.

<sup>29</sup> Wood; Veneri. Insider attacks are of particular concern in this regard. See Richard Oppel, Jr., and Graham Bowley, "Afghan Attacks on Allied Troops Prompt NATO to Shift Policy," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Suhrke.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–140.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Corruption in Afghanistan, Bribery as reported by the victims*, January 2010, available at <[www.unhcr.org/ref-world/docid/4cad7b072.html](http://www.unhcr.org/ref-world/docid/4cad7b072.html)>; *Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People* (Washington, DC: The Asia Foundation, 2011); Transparency International,

*Corruption Perceptions Index*, 2011, available at <<http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/>>.

<sup>33</sup> Wood.

<sup>34</sup> International Crisis Group, *Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government*, Middle East Report No. 113, September 26, 2011; International Crisis Group, *Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal*, Middle East Report No. 99, October 26, 2010; Michael Knights, *The Iraqi Security Forces: Local Context and U.S. Assistance*, Policy Notes 4, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 2011.

<sup>35</sup> International Crisis Group, *Loose Ends*, 5–8, 12–17; Knights, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ned Parker, "Machiavelli in Mesopotamia: Nouri al-Maliki Builds the Body Politic," *World Policy Journal* (Spring 2009), 17–25; Nir Rosen, "Baghdad Gives Sunni Rude Awakening," *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, 2010; Nir Rosen, "What America Left Behind in Iraq," *Foreign Policy*, September 7, 2011; Steven Lee Myers and Anthony Shadid, "Leader Faulted on Using Army in Iraqi Politics," *The New York Times*, February 10, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> International Crisis Group, *Loose Ends*, 5–8; Parker, 95–103.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Knights, *Iraq's Political Crisis: Challenges for U.S. Policy*, Policy Watch 1884, Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy, December 21, 2011; Rosen, "Baghdad Gives Sunni Rude Awakening"; Parker.

<sup>39</sup> Parker; Rosen, "Baghdad Gives Sunni Rude Awakening"; and Knights (2011).

<sup>40</sup> Parker, 99.

<sup>41</sup> Anthony Blinken, "Morning in Mesopotamia," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2012), 152–154; Norman Ricklefs, "A Solid State," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2012), 154–156.

<sup>42</sup> Wood offers a good examination of the importance of cohesion to the future of the ANA.